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## Encouraging Participation and Connecting with Students in First Year French Classes

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## **Encouraging participation and connecting with students in first year French classes**

French 101, 102 and 103 will soon become French 1111 and French 1112 as we transition from a quarter to a semester system. The future of our language programs is uncertain, and it is of paramount importance to attract and retain language learners. Multiple strategies were adapted from the ACUE certification modules to encourage healthy patterns of participation in the classroom, better communication between learners, and between the students and their instructor.

### **I- The first impression matters:**

Using a seating chart on the very first day of class is an efficient way to learn the students' names fast. I prepared an empty seating chart for my French 101 class, and I used it for the first week of class. The seating charts for UH 042 and UH 061 are attached to this document. I knew the names of all my French 101 students by the end of the second meeting.

Another technique I implemented was using success cards. I had a French 103 class in the Spring which was made up of a large number of students who started in 101 with me in the Fall, then who went on to 102 in Winter, followed by 103. They knew what to expect from my classes, and they were the perfect candidates for the success cards. I asked them to complete the index cards before the end of the quarter, they consisted in words of advice and encouragement to future students. I passed those cards out on the first day of class this fall, and asked my new students to share with the rest of the class some of the advice they had received from former students.

### **II- Participation strategies:**

I have decided to concentrate on more wait time, use prompting to encourage more participation, manage dominant talkers and encourage quieter students.

I have been aware of the importance of wait time, but my students often display embarrassment when I pause and wait for one of them to answer a question. I occasionally try to look toward the window while I wait because I can see them grin at me, or frown, or glance toward one another. This happened yesterday, but I told them to take their time, to try and come up with something while I slowly wrote my question on the board. I took my time doing this, and when I was done, a couple of students raised their hand to suggest an answer. Once they got feedback that confirmed they were on

the right track, other students started participating as well. I think what worked was the fact that I did not embarrass them by standing in front of them and waiting.

To encourage more participation, I have also decided to say how many responses I would like for each question I am asking. For example, I was presenting likes and dislikes, and I asked three volunteers to tell me what they liked to do. When this was done, I said I wanted 3 more to tell me what they didn't like to do. I showed them 3 fingers for 3 volunteers and I looked around the room, then 2 for 2 volunteers, I told them it felt like we were at an auction, how much for an answer? This made them laugh!

Managing dominant talkers is very important in a language class. Learning a new language can be very stressful to some students. They know they should speak as much as possible to improve on their skills, but they are worried to sound funny, or to make mistakes. I've realized that I always call on the dominant talkers to model the activities I want my students to participate in. I count on them to help the rest of the class understand what the activity is about, so they can base their answers on the dominant talkers'. I had not realized that this could actually discourage other students who may feel the work will either be done by others, or who may feel I do not value their contribution to the class.

Therefore in order to manage my dominant talkers and encourage quieter students, I did a couple of activities in my class yesterday. In one of them, I gave students an exercise to complete in groups of 3 and 4. I gave them one minute to prepare one answer as a group. After a minute, I randomly picked one person in each group to come to the board and write their answer, so I had 4 or 5 students writing simultaneously on the board. Then we moved on to the second answer of the exercise. This lasted until all students in the class had written answers on the board. The students really liked this activity and felt very confident going to the board to write.

In another class, I presented how to tell the time in French. I presented this in small increments of 30 seconds each, for example I first presented 1AM, 2AM, 3AM, etc. then I selected 4 students to give me the time for 5AM, 6AM etc , the 4<sup>th</sup> student being either a very quiet participant or someone who doesn't do well in French. As that last student had already heard my explanation and the other students' sentences, he/she was able to say the time too. I repeated the process adding minutes, for ex 1:05, 1:10, etc... then again selected 4 more students to say 2:05, 3:10 etc. After a few minutes, everyone in class had been called upon.

I feel these activities went very well and all my students got to speak French on many occasions during the class. They also felt they could be prompted to answer at any time, and this kept them engaged!

Last, I have started cold-calling students. This is not a strategy I like to use, but the ACUE course has taught me that it is an important practice to reach out to students, assess if the material is being processed, and to ensure that students' focus is constantly on what is happening in the classroom.

One last ACUE piece of advice I will follow is to be careful when using the word "easy", or expressions such as "you'll be fine" or "don't worry". These words are meant to reassure, but they can be demeaning to students who are struggling.

### **III- Encouraging self evaluations:**

The semester performance prognosis inventory (SPPI) is an ACUE strategy which I took the liberty to label "diagnostic and prognostic tool": I want to show that it is a tool that can diagnose potential issues, and predict an outcome. I returned my class's first quizzes and passed out my handouts, which you can find below.

I gave my students a few minutes to start answering the worksheet, then I asked them to tell me if they could figure out the purpose of such an assignment. I was relieved to see immediate reactions. Jessica told the class that it was a way for students to reflect on their work and their study habits, she called it a "self-assessment", it was also a way to find solutions to improve on what they already did.

I went on to explain that this reflection could be a starting point for sharing with others techniques and good practices. For example, I asked if anybody with outstanding grades on vocabulary quizzes could explain how they do it. French vocabulary words can be difficult because of spelling issues which even the French have, so I give more words than points, and therefore expect students who have prepared to get 10/10 every time. If they get extra points, they count toward their next vocabulary quiz in case they miss it or forget to prepare for it. Two students immediately raised their hand: one student explained that she writes every single word on a paper, then quizzes herself. If she gets words wrong, she then writes those words 5 times. Another student said she prepares at the last minute just before class so the vocabulary is still fresh in her memory! Needless to say, I was not delighted by that answer, so I told the class that MacKelsey was lucky to have studied AP French at high school, and that she had

probably already seen these words before, and therefore in her case, yes, reviewing familiar words at the last minute was a good strategy! Then I turned to the first student and told her that writing down the words was a great way to process and memorize them. I was very happy with this informal discussion.

Below: the SPPI for French 103.

### **Self-Diagnostic and Prognostic Tool**

Look at your grades. Your total should be out of 150. If you have already turned in your homework for week 3 and it has been graded, deduct those points from your total.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ points out of 150, which means I have a/an \_\_\_\_\_ in the class. (A > 135, B > 120, C > 105, D > 90)

If you are in the A-range, how do you prepare for class?

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Look at your vocabulary quizzes: do you always get at least 13/10 to balance for potential lower grades? \_\_\_\_\_ If you do, how do you prepare?

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Look at your homework points: you should have a minimum of 40 points right now. Is it the case for you? \_\_\_\_\_. Do you always turn in EC to increase your chances of getting an A in the class, or in case you miss an assignment on a busy week? \_\_\_\_\_

If you have less than 40/50 for your homework, do you always read my feedback to see if there is anything you can do immediately to get more points? \_\_\_\_\_. Do you understand how to turn in your homework? \_\_\_\_\_ If you don't, have you seen me before or after class, come to my office hour, or emailed me about it? \_\_\_\_\_

Look at your quizzes' grades. Did you miss one of them? \_\_\_\_\_ If you got "As" on both, 18/20 and 27-30/30, how did you prepare that made a difference?

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If you got 26/30 or lower on the last quiz did you read my feedback? \_\_\_\_\_ What could help you prepare better next time? \_\_\_\_\_

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When something is unclear in class, do you try to find clarification yourself? If yes, what do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you use my office hours, ask me to repeat a concept before or after class, or do you meet with the tutor at the lab? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you read your notes again before coming to class? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you already missed class? \_\_\_\_\_ If you have, did you contact me to ask about what you had missed? \_\_\_\_\_ How did you catch up with the missed material? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you arrive late on a regular basis? \_\_\_\_\_ When you do arrive late, do you ask your teacher for anything you might have missed? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **IV- Feedback for learning:**

In order to encourage students to let me know if they have some difficulties with one or more topics, I decided to use the anonymity of a polleverywhere forum.

I lectured my students on two main concepts, the use of c'est vs. il/elle est to say it/she/he is, and the use of adjectives. After each concept I asked them to talk to their partners, and if they still had questions about the concepts, they should send me the questions and I would answer them next time. This went pretty well, but not extremely well. Students were a little quiet and I only got 7 responses out of 15 students (see below).

When comparing two objects or people of different genders, which one do you have the adjective agree with?	Text (US)	+1 (xxx) xxx-4357	January 16, 2019, 05:20 PM
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What's the difference between vieux and vieil? Aren't they both masculine?	Text (US)	+1 (xxx) xxx-4457	January 16, 2019, 03:10 PM
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More about the conjugations of adjectives	Text (US)	+1 (xxx) xxx-0676	January 16, 2019, 03:10 PM
Confused about the different spelling of new	Text (US)	+1 (xxx) xxx-0499	January 16, 2019, 03:08 PM
still a little confused when to use "c'est sont" & "ils sont"	Text (US)	+1 (xxx) xxx-3784	January 16, 2019, 02:35 PM
More about the C'est	pollev.com/profmorgan 067	Rubi	January 16, 2019, 02:35 PM

Based on these responses, I prepared a tutorial on c'est vs il/elle est and another one on the different forms of the adjectives. I used Jing, which is a very easy tool to master, and posted the tutorials on Blackboard.

Last, I have implemented closing activities. I feel these activities are usually the ones that I leave out the most. Today for my French 101 class, as a closing activity, I prepared a slide that summarized what students would have learned during class. I do understand the idea of restating what has been learned during class, so that what has been discussed last can be better retained. It was a short paragraph with a few blanks, as shown below:

1- In order to introduce myself I can say:

\_\_\_\_\_ (my name).

2- Et toi? and et vous? both mean \_\_\_\_\_

The difference between them is \_\_\_\_\_

3- When I want to turn a word referring to masculine into a feminine word I add \_\_\_\_\_

4- The letters of the alphabet I've learned today that I find difficult and would like to memorize in French are \_\_\_\_\_

I am glad that I found the time to give them this, as I have always wanted to cram in as much material as possible, and never took the time to have a closing activity. I asked my students to get into pairs and write the answers down, and turn them in as they leave. This went very well, I could see they were engaged and helping each-other. Only one student actually asked me to help her, as her classmate had already left. Since she only enrolled today and missed our first class together, she found it harder than others. Overall, except for one or two spelling mistakes, all students were able to find these answers. I will definitely try and do this from now on, and the class felt really organized and complete with this.

I then decided to have a closing activity with my French 102 class that I had not planned ahead of time. Since I had taught them different adjectives used to describe people, and how to turn masculine adjective forms into feminine adjective forms, I asked students at the end of class to write down 5 adjectives that characterized them, and to make sure that they used the proper endings for these adjectives. I could see a couple of mistakes here and there, but overall they were quickly able to write down a short description of themselves, and I told them I would return those papers to them and they could use them as study guide for their next quiz. One student stayed behind to ask me to repeat one of my explanations. Having such a closing activity really gets them to think and to ask for help immediately.